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ABSTRACT

Noting that most children living in Australia have access to a television, video games, and computers and are influenced by the content of their viewing and interactive games, this report examines the impact of media violence on young children. Topics discussed include the recognition of violence on television and video/computer games, reasons for children's play, and a description of violent games commonly seen. The report further discusses the negative psychological effects of television violence and violent games. Additional topics include appropriate models for children, gender differences, moral development, early intervention for children exhibiting frequent aggressive behavior and speech, the courage to say "no" to violence, conflict resolution procedures in early childhood and school settings, and a program philosophy to facilitate positive conflict resolution practices. The book concludes with further suggestions for practitioners and an example of a preschool peace policy. Numerous case study descriptions illustrate the main points of the report. (Contains 26 references.) (KB)

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GAMES CHILDREN PLAY

THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA VIOLENCE ON YOUNG CHILDREN

By Mimi Wellisch

PS 029101

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GAMES CHILDREN PLAY

THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA VIOLENCE ON YOUNG CHILDREN

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About the Author

Mimi Wellisch has taught in many early childhood settings including a multicultural long day care centre, preschools in both Sydney and country NSW, and in affluent as well as low socioeconomic areas. Mimi holds a Masters in Early Childhood (Macquarie) degree and is presently studying psychology. Her fourth book on early childhood is in press, and she has given numerous papers at conferences and written journal articles on her areas of interest and research activities. These interests include early reading, environmental education, conflict resolution, and the education of gifted and talented children. Her latest passion is the influence of media violence on young children's perceptions of the world.

'A child should not be permitted to violate the personal rights of others. Parents who do not wish to spoil their children must distinguish between freedom and licence.'

A. S. Neill

5

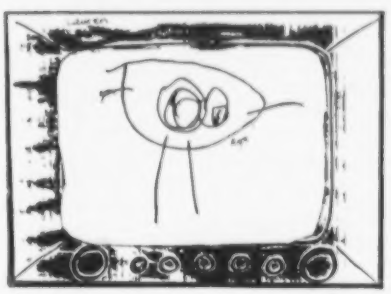
GAMES CHILDREN PLAY

THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA VIOLENCE ON YOUNG CHILDREN

Most children living in Australia today have access to a television, video games, and computers, and are influenced by their viewing and interactive games. Children's television programs and computer games can be divided into two distinct categories:

- Programs for educational purposes
- Programs for entertainment purposes

Many locally-produced children's TV programs are of a very high standard and have won awards for excellence. Research has shown that children who view altruistic behaviour on television tend to become more helpful and cooperative. Similarly, many computer games are intellectually challenging and can enhance learning.



'Agro'

Violent actions to look for

- Depictions of injurious physical violence to another person.
- Depictions of psychological violence.
- Heroes who kill 'baddies'.
- The use of menacing, threatening or intimidating language.
- The use of weapons and special effects for the purpose of injury and destruction.
- Any show that also runs commercials of toy merchandise shown during the program featuring an abundance of muscles and/or weapons.
- Interactive games which involve killing and being killed.

Recognising violence on TV and video/computer games

There are, however, other entertainment programs for children, as well as video and computer games, that entertain through excitement and suspense. Many of these programs contain violence. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between what is violence and what is just plain fun and entertainment. For instance, you have probably had a good laugh at the Roadrunner or Donald Duck squashed flat by a machine. And you have most likely laughed at the misfortunes that clowns bestow upon one another. So, when should we become concerned about the type of violence shown in a program or in games?

The list alongside provides some idea of what to look for with an eye to censoring children's viewing and games.

How violent TV and electronic games affect play behaviour

- Children identify with the heroes (i.e. 'I am Godzilla').
- Some children play 'goodies' and chase others, who are 'baddies'.
- Children copy the violence they have watched.
- Children use intimidating, menacing language, such as 'I have a gun and I'm going to kill you!'
- Children play games in which they pretend to be the heroes, and someone inevitably gets really hurt.

Many children's TV programs are of a very high standard

Why children play

We know from our own observations, as well as research of other cultures, that one function of play is to practise adult roles, either imitating actual adult behaviour or role playing at being an adult (Fleer, 1999). Australian children study their adult models and play around with these roles. So not only do they romp around, playing fun games such as chasing, they also dress up and pretend to cook, and, depending on their environment, they pretend to log trees or go fishing.

Violent games

Since the advent of television, new elements of play are emerging that do not reflect a healthy direction. These games are inspired by violent TV heroes on shows watched by young children (French & Pena, 1991), and by violent electronic games (Griffiths, 1999; Dill & Dill, 1998; Wiegman & van Schie, 1998).

The boundary between fantasy and reality

In the past when children played at being heroes and villains, their games were inspired by their fantasy rather than TV images, and children were aware of the difference between their games and real life most of the time. Today, however, there is a blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality as depicted on television (i.e. *Police Rescue* versus current affairs programs). This is very confusing for young children, who often cannot differentiate between dramatic and factual television programs (Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 1995), and has serious implications for play behaviour, because, as we have seen, one of the functions of play is to practise being adults.

New games

There are many new violent games played by young children inspired by television programs and electronic games. Observations of such games have included:

- constructions of mass destruction devices;
- killing games (including Hercules and Xena);
- Ninja Turtles (played by girls and boys);
- Power Rangers (played by girls and boys);
- robbers (mixed, although mainly boys);
- baking dolls in the oven (boys);
- hacking up one another (played by girls and boys);
- hacking or chopping up dolls (played by boys);
- running after 'different' children (e.g. those from a different cultural background), making them into the 'baddies';
- games involving strangling;
- taking turns at Jump-run-heels-into-doll on floor (boys);
- kidnapping baby (boys) (seen on *Xena* in 1997). This game is still played, having been handed down from preschool generation to preschool generation, and has moved on to primary school. One mother, who had witnessed the game, confessed that she was scared of leaving her eight-year-old daughter alone with her friend's baby.

Young children often cannot differentiate between dramatic and factual television programs and this has serious implications for play behaviour

Other disturbing behaviours

There has always been a very small number of young children who have talked about suicide. These children have generally been psychologically disturbed, and in need of counselling. The word 'kill', however, is being used ever more frequently by young children. A mother recently confided how deeply disturbed she was by her otherwise well-balanced and popular five-year-old daughter's threats to shoot herself and kill herself. She said the child had used such threats during the past year whenever thwarted or frustrated. She did not know how the child had thought of this, as she had not been watching the type of TV programs where she could have learned such ideas. Another mother told of killing games that her children, who are not allowed to watch the programs that generate such games, bring home from school. Her children learn the games in the school playground, and then continue them at home.

One of the functions of play is to practise being adults

The effects of TV-viewing and electronic games—some general facts

- Research shows that children remember what they see on commercials and ask for the product. For instance, 90 per cent of children watching an advertisement for a particular cereal want that cereal in favour of other cereals (Kaplan, 1991). We must therefore conclude that if they watch violence on TV, it will have a similar effect. And they watch a lot of TV
- Preschoolers in America watch 27.8 hours of TV per week, which works out at a total of seven years of TV viewing by the time they are 18 (Levin, 1998). It can be speculated that Australian preschoolers would probably watch a similar amount of TV per week.
- 57 per cent of TV programs contain violence.
- Close to 80 per cent of video games include aggression or violence (Dietz, 1998).

Negative psychological effects of TV violence and violent games

For some children, watching TV violence can result in a number of symptoms reminiscent of post-traumatic stress disorder. The same may be true of video and computer games. These include:

- obsessive talk about disturbing scenes from shows;
- short attention span;
- wakefulness at night;
- guarded and distrustful behaviour;
- defensive and angry behaviour;
- detachment from others and lack of empathy;
- nightmares.

Case Study

Tom (4.7 years):

Sometimes I think that baddies are in my room under my bed—monster baddies—under my bed. And I get bad dreams. Once I used to watch the Goosebumps. *I liked them, but they gave me bad dreams.*

Teacher: *What happens in* Goosebumps?

Tom: *People get scared, there are scary things; it's not real but there are bad monsters on it. It's really yucky stuff and people wear masks; it's scary.*

Teacher: *What kinds of dreams do you get?*

Tom: *Wolves eat me and tigers are near me. And the other night I had a dream that we had two cats and one was wild, it was really wild …*

Teacher: *When did you see the show about wolves? Which show was that?*

Tom: *I didn't see a show of that.*

The roots of racism: The 'goodies' and the 'baddies'

Children who watch violent shows invariably say they like these shows because 'the [heroes] kill baddies'.
Our films, TV shows and video games depict 'goodies', or heroes, mostly as white males with magical powers and massive muscles. They are usually dressed lightly, occasionally bare-chested, and often have long hair. 'Baddies' almost always wear a mask and armour, and are

often depicted in a dehumanising fashion, speaking in broken English or making animal-like sounds. They may have animal-type features, and an ability to inflict injuries by using some unearthly force. 'Baddies' usually wear dark clothing and sometimes they are black or Asian, as in *The Phantom Menace* Star Wars movie.

Case Study

Teacher: *Tell me about Hercules. Do you like Hercules?*

Jason, (4 years): *Yes, I like the television of it. I like him because the baddies...*

Teacher: *The baddies? Who are the baddies?*

Jason: *The baddies steal babies. That's why Hercules fights the baddies, so they don't get the baby.*

Teacher: *Have you ever met a baddie?*

Children: *No.*

Teacher: *Are baddies real?*

Jason: *Yes, 'cause on* Ninja Turtles *they show black baddies.*

Teacher: *Black baddies?*

Jason: *Yes, and they were picking up the red Ninja Turtle, but he was kicking them back in the head.*

Teacher: *In the head!*

Children: *Yeah!*

Teacher: *How can you tell that a person is really bad?*

Louis: *They steal people.*

Jason: *Joe's friend used to be a baddie, but he isn't any more.*

Teacher: *How do you become good? Can you become good after you've been a baddie?*

Louis: *If you want.*

Teacher: *How?*

Jason: *Grow more hair.*

Teacher: *Grow more hair? Alex hasn't got much hair; he has just had his hair cut. Is he a baddie?*

Children in unison: *No-o-o-o!*

Teacher: *How can you tell he is not a baddie?*

Jason: *'Cause he has white skin.*

Louis: *Yeah, you have to have white skin so you don't turn into a baddie.*

Long-term effects of watching TV violence

- By the time a child has finished primary school, he or she will have watched at least 8000 murders and 100 000 other acts of violence. 'Much of this violence is portrayed in an unrealistic, antiseptic fashion that is believed to desensitise viewers to the horrible realities of violent behaviour' (Weiten, 1998, p.446).
- Aggressive children prefer to watch more and more violent TV and video games, establishing a circular pattern. Such children are often unpopular, so they watch more TV, getting reinforcement for their actions through the shows they watch, rather than through their social interactions (Kaplan, 1991; Wiegman & van Schie, 1998).
- Children who are aggressive during primary school continue to be aggressive during adolescence and young adulthood.
- Most children who exhibit aggression are boys, and this trend has been observed globally, regardless of culture or race.

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A number of factors can mould and influence social behaviour. These can be grouped as:

Internal Environment

- temperament of child
- family circumstances
- moral developmental stage

External Environment

- cultural
- social
- religious
- political

Appropriate models for children

The manner in which children form a model of their world and their role within it has changed dramatically since the middle of this century. Television has contributed strongly to this change and has increasingly become a major competitor to parental and family influences. The results can easily be detected in children's behaviour and play. There are a number of factors that mould and influence children's social behaviour. Traditionally these could be grouped under internal environment and external environment.

It has always been the interaction between the internal environmental factors that has had the greatest impact on the formation of children's perception, experiences, and behaviour. However, since television has moved into our lounge rooms, and has brought with it the external environment, it has become a major factor in influencing young children. Where, in the recent past, children used to model themselves mainly on their parents and family members, they are now just as likely to copy the hero from a favourite TV show. Another factor that informs children's play is their interaction with their peers and the games they play. This is especially relevant now that more than half of the under-five-year-olds are in care outside the home. There is no longer a clear distinction between the internal and external factors that help shape children's lives.

Television has become a major factor in influencing young children

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How do children become aggressive?

We now know that there are a number of factors involved in whether children become altruistic or aggressive:

- their genetic predisposition (Rushton, Fulker, Neale, Nias & Eysenck, 1986; Shore, 1997)
- their sex;
- how their parents interact with each other and the child;
- preferred television shows;
- exposure to war; and
- abuse, including sexual abuse.

We also know that

- 10–15 per cent of children are the cause of most of the aggressive acts in the school playground.

Children tend to copy their TV heroes

Why are boys more aggressive than girls?

Girls and boys are more alike than they are different. Differences in behaviour are usually attributed to their gender and used as justification for bad behaviour in boys and compliant behaviour in girls. Evolutionary psychologists explain this by arguing that males and females have evolved differently over time in order to survive. Females, as a rule, have been more selective about their sexual partners than have males, and males therefore had to develop strategies whereby they won social dominance over their competitors. A successful strategy was the use of aggression. There is also some evidence of a difference between circulating levels of male and female hormones and aggression (Weiten, 1998). Although there is some evidence that gender differences have a biological basis, environment seems to be a more likely factor. For instance, there is certainly strong evidence that, by the time they are three years old, boys are generally more aggressive than girls of the same age (Hyde, 1986; Legault & Strayer, 1990).

Where children used to model themselves mainly on their parents and family members, they are now just as likely to copy the hero from a favourite TV show

Conditioning and modelling

Another cause of gender difference lies in how we socialise our children. We are slowly changing as a society, with many families ignoring the traditional notions of how boys and girls should behave. Nevertheless, it still stands in many families that 'boys

Boys tend to be rewarded for 'masculine' behaviour

Children model their sex-stereotypical behaviour from

- home (mum, dad, siblings, cousins, uncles and aunts, family friends);
- school (teachers tend to give more attention to boys, expect girls to be well-behaved and self-directed. Children's books also reinforce gender stereotypes); and
- the media.

don't cry' and 'girls don't climb trees'. From the earliest moments that a baby enters the world we tend to treat it according to its gender. Studies show that fathers in particular tend to reward gender-appropriate behaviour, that girls are less pressured to behave in 'feminine' ways, but that boys are disapproved of when they behave like a 'sissy', and are rewarded more for 'masculine' behaviour.

Another very powerful factor is how children model their behaviour on that of their parents. It probably comes as no surprise, then, that boys are drawn to imitate their fathers and girls to copy their mothers.

TV commercials in particular typically depict females as submissive, passive and emotional, young, attractive, and sexy. Males, on the other hand, are often shown to be independent, assertive, aggressive, and competent. This influence is very strong, and sex-typing is fairly well established by the end of the preschool years. I once asked a five-year-old girl who lived with her single father to tell me whether 'stove' was a 'mummy'-word or a 'daddy'-word. She did not hesitate in responding that it was a 'mummy'-word despite the fact that she saw her father cook every night.

Gender differences, child upbringing, and TV violence

There may also be some differences with regard to tolerance of television violence and parent gender. In both the case studies below, it is the father who insists on watching the kinds of shows that cause the mothers concern:

Case Study 1

One mother, whose husband was a doctor, told me of the fight she had had—and lost—when her husband insisted on watching the TV news in front of her two-year-old daughter and four-year-old son. When the boy asked his dad about the disturbing images from the Kosovo war, the father ignored him and continued watching. He also refused to turn the news off or watch it later.

Case Study 2

A mother, whose husband is a farmer, confided that, now she has finally dissuaded him from watching Xena the

Warrior Princess, *their three young children play much less violently. They play fewer sword-games with sticks, and are less likely to play games involving fighting. Instead, they play more creative games, such as making a tent.*

Children's moral development

Many factors influence how children behave socially. As we have already seen, children's genetic inheritance, the home environment, television, and electronic games all contribute to their social behaviour. Furthermore, children's stage of moral development also has an influence on their social interactions. There are many competing theories on moral development. Kohlberg's (1976) six stages of moral development is generally accepted and supported by research.

Children's genetic inheritance, the home environment, television, and electronic games all contribute to their social behaviour

During the first stage, children aged three to six years generally tend to view their world through the notions of

- right or wrong;
- black or white (Kohlberg, 1976).

Children at this stage also

- have egocentric points of view;
- have drives determined by their own needs;
- conclude that something is good or bad depending on whether they get punished or not.

Children who view altruistic behaviour on television tend to become more helpful and cooperative

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 17 (e)

Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her wellbeing ...

If a child exhibits frequent aggressive behaviour and speech and is fascinated by killing and war-type games, it is imperative to take action as early as possible

Case Study

Two of Tom's favourite shows are the *Biker Mice* and *Xena*. This interview demonstrates the lack of firm moral anchors in a four-year-old child as well as the immaturity of his reasoning skills:

Tom: *Biker Mice are goodies. They put the bad people in jail, they kill them if they're baddies.*

Me: *But isn't it bad to kill?*

Tom: *Yes.*

Me: *So why do you think they're good?*

Tom: *Cause they are. Because they are good, they kill the baddies and they're still good because there's a lady on there, and they don't kill her. And I like Xena because she kills bad people and saves people.*

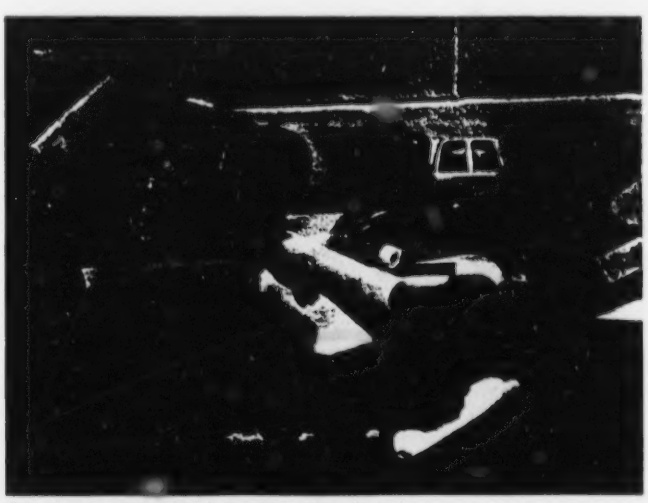
Me: *But isn't it bad to kill people?*

Tom: *I don't know.*

According to Kohlberg (1976), the second stage of moral development takes place when children are around seven to eight years old. This period is marked by

- some type of give and take;
- some looking after others' needs as well as their own.

The third and fourth stages are marked by adopting morals in accordance with close others, and accepting what is right and wrong as determined by the rules and laws of society.



Toys that involve 'killing' should not be allowed

15

Early intervention

If a child exhibits frequent aggressive behaviour and speech and is fascinated by killing and war-type games, it is imperative to take action as early as possible:

1. Assess the child, using a developmental check-list.
2. Observe child's play and his or her interaction with others. Consult with parents.
3. Find out if the child has been exposed to war.
4. Find out if the child has spent long hours in outside care from the time of his/her infancy (Manne, 1996).
5. Find out if the child feels disempowered through exposure to domestic violence, and/or physical, sexual, psychological or emotional abuse.
6. Find out how the child spends his or her days at home and whether he or she watches violent shows on TV.
7. Recommend that parents:
   - have the child checked by a paediatrician to ensure that he or she is medically sound;
   - put away all war-like toys (Power Rangers, toy soldiers, guns, knives, swords);
   - cut out all violent TV viewing, videos, and video/computer games;
   - spend extra time with the child, doing activities involving non-violent interests of the child;
   - if there is no change after a reasonable time, seek professional counselling;
   - contact the local early intervention clinic for advice if the child continues to act out.

Case Study

There is generally great social tolerance in the four-year-olds' playroom. Children are aware of rules, aware of one another, and show caring behaviour. If a child is hurt or has suffered an injustice, others are quick to report the injury to the nearest adult. Andrew, however, is different. He is excessively vocal and attention-seeking and his behaviour is pushy and aggressive. Although he has learned to say 'excuse me', he uses this phrase to interrupt constantly and loudly. His conversations often include television heroes, and the word 'kill' occurs frequently in his constant verbal outpourings. He is fond of contorting his face and showing his teeth. He has no sense of

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 5

To provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance ...

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19

Protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse ...

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28, 2

That school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity ...

Suggested interaction with an aggressive child

- Discourage all killing games.
- Discourage games involving pretend weapons.
- Avoid being drawn into an argument ('but he played it, too', etc).
- Be absolutely consistent.
- Give a great deal of attention for positive play.
- Give more attention to the child who is hurt during a violent game than to the persecutor.
- Avoid giving warnings when child behaves in socially inappropriate manner. Consequences to breaking group rules should be immediate. An example is to temporarily remove aggressive child from interaction with others.
- Explain the reason, i.e. 'at this preschool I will not let anyone hurt you, and I will not let you hurt anyone.'
- Time away from the group should be reasonable; for instance, one minute for each year, i.e. four minutes for a four-year-old.
- Develop an individualised behavioural plan (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The plan can include a cognitive therapy approach to changing the child's negative thinking and behaviour.

personal boundaries, and he constantly tries to impress: 'Scuse me,' he shouts, attempting to interrupt a conversation between a teacher and another child. 'I have a toy water-pistol at home, and it can really shoot water!' During playtime, when the toy zoo animals are out, Andrew is quick to secure the tigers and lions.

At lunchtime he tells tall stories, drowning out other children's attempts at adding to the conversation by increasing the loudness of his voice. When nothing else gets him attention, he continues with derogatory put-downs: 'You are garbage. You are all garbage!' He recognises a wrong levelled at himself instantly, and has a strong sense of injustice. However, he lacks empathy and is unaware of the needs of others. For instance, he was observed chasing Tom, who was holding a toy of contention. Tom tripped and fell flat on his stomach. Andrew stepped over Tom's spread-eagled body, yanked the toy out of Tom's hand, and walked off without looking back.

Having the courage to say 'no' to violence

There is a very strong belief in our society that 'goodies and baddies' games are character-building in terms of morality, that children have to make these moral choices individually, and that they will do so naturally. But, with our society's strong pro-violence diet in the media, with graphic television depictions of violent anti-social behaviour, this belief has become a romantic fallacy. As parents, facilitators, early interventionists, teachers, and models, we must consistently intervene in potentially violent games if we are to have any counter-influence. We have to let the children know that violent games are unacceptable and anti-social. There is nothing romantic about children becoming frightened and hurt.

Case Study

One day I heard a four-year-old girl screaming and crying hysterically in the playground. I rushed to her aid from across the playground, only to see three boys backing off guiltily. I asked the crying child what the matter was. She cried in terror 'They are going to kill me; they said they would kill me.' She did not seem to think it was a game.

She thought it was real. That was the last day that playing killing games at our preschool was tolerated. At our preschool the word 'kill' is now a four-letter word, and games that children play are the games we think are OK.

Solutions

It is essential that staff members relate harmoniously, and a positive, caring environment is a must. Children's attention can then be drawn to that fact, asking, 'Have you ever seen Robyn and me (snatch, hit, talk to each other) like that?'

- For children under three, sharing is a difficult concept. Developmentally, they may not yet be ready to share. Plan their day so that such conflict can be avoided. So, if there is a conflict about a toy, supply two toys. Distractions also work well.
- Preschoolers can be helped to express their fears and needs. They can also participate in group discussions on Aesop's fables, and compare these with real conflicts between the children. Group rules can then be derived from these discussions.
- Children with good language skills and school children have more options. Instead of the usual quick-fix methods such as taking away the object of conflict, or time out to 'think about' fighting, teachers can model and teach the rudiments of conflict resolution skills.

Conflict resolution: How everyone can win

1. Ask children how they each see their problem (e.g. conflict about sharing a bike).
2. Sum up their shared problem, i.e. 'so you both want a bike?'
3. Find a solution. Ask each child what solution would be fair.
4. Summarise each suggestion: 'So Jane can ride on the back?'
5. Ensure that both children feel the solution meets their needs.
6. Help children plan their solution.
7. Ask children to tell you how their solution worked.

A positive, caring, environment is essential for promoting harmonious behaviour

Teachers can model and teach the rudiments of conflict resolution skills

Conflict resolution at school

Children's conflicts are often dismissed with 'I do not want to hear tales', and a complaining child is called a *dobber* in a derogatory way. But when children 'dob', they are simply demonstrating their inability to handle conflict. This presents a teaching opportunity to introduce conflict resolution techniques. Recess and lunchtimes are perfect times for the teacher on playground duty to help children resolve their conflicts according to the method above.

Active listening and assertiveness

Help children become assertive rather than aggressive. Most children tend to hit rather than talk.

- Find out what caused the hitting ('You must have been upset. What did Karen do to you?').

Suggest that they *tell* the other child what was bothering them. The assertive statement is:

'When you (bite, kick, etc.) me, I feel (angry, hurt, sad, etc.) and I would like you to (stop, be nice, etc.).'

- Be prepared to spend a lot more time coaching aggressive children than non-aggressive ones. They need your help to learn these important social skills.

19

Having a theory that fits the practice

A service's philosophy can include the following:

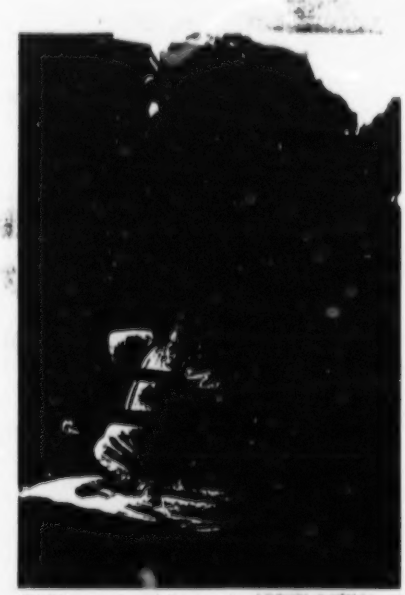
- Preschool is a safe haven, a place where children can safely practise peaceful, creative play.
- We do not hurt children at preschool, and we do not advocate such behaviour and games ('It is not OK to play this game').
- Feelings, including anger, are natural and healthy, and can be expressed appropriately. Children are therefore encouraged to express angry feelings safely. Examples of safe ways of expressing anger are through drama, movement, and banging play-dough. Children who are able to talk are encouraged to express anger verbally.
- When children counter with 'it is only a game', or 'it is just a pretend gun', we maintain our stance, explaining that it is not nice to play killing games. 'Can you think of a game where you can help people?'

A similar philosophy can be adopted by schools by changing the wording to suit the setting.

Case Study

Violent games are banned at Dorrigo Preschool. Children are still occasionally observed playing such games, and child care workers are vigilant in the same way as they are vigilant in repeatedly reminding children to wash their hands after going to the toilet. Reminding children to behave appropriately and safely is seen as the role of the adult. Children are always told that violent games are not OK because they can hurt others. As a consequence, the children feel safe and have become much more relaxed and creative in their play. If children cannot think of other games, suggestions are asked for from the group. This usually results in one child coming up with a good idea for non-violent play that the others adopt enthusiastically.

Be prepared to spend more time coaching agressive children than non-aggressive ones



Children can still be inspired by fantasy

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Additional suggestions

- Have a peace policy. This is in line with the Department of Education's anti-bullying policy.
- Mention the existence of the policy in your information booklet to inform prospective parents.
- Involve parents by running a parent night on TV violence (Wellisch, 1998) and on behaviour management.
- Advocate against violent media on behalf of children.
- Encourage parents to make complaints about violent programs. The regulations can be obtained from: Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, 44 Avenue Road, Mosman NSW. Tel: (02) 9960 2622 or www.aba.gov.au

Involve parents by running a parent night on TV, and encourage them to make complaints about violent TV programs

Help children learn alternative tools to being powerful by:

- saying sorry;
- taking turns wearing a special nice friend badge. The wearer of the badge helps others who are hurt or sad (children can thank the nice friend at the end of each day);
- using conflict resolution to solve problems;
- becoming assertive rather than aggressive;
- communicating rather than hitting;
- sharing; and
- inviting others to a game and asking to join in a game.

Help children learn alternative ways to be powerful

Peace Policy—an example

Dorrigo Preschool is a safe haven for children, and the preschool community is against all forms of violence. The policy is actively enforced by assuming that no child is inherently 'naughty' or bad. In line with this philosophy, no 'goodies and baddies' games are acceptable at preschool. As part of this policy we do not allow games which involve 'killing' people, or toys such as guns and knives (including pretend guns and knives). However, children make mistakes and sometimes behave in socially unacceptable ways. So we target the behaviour, not the child.

The Dorrigo preschool community is against all forms of violence

- **Children are introduced to the notion that hurtful and antisocial behaviour is not acceptable, and if they have accidentally or deliberately hurt another child they are expected to apologise.**
- **Children who are involved in a conflict are consulted, encouraged to express what they each see as the problem, and instructed in alternative methods of resolving their problems.**
- **In solving conflicts, children are encouraged to talk to one another, for instance ask for toys rather than to snatch or hit out.**
- **If the communication is ineffectual, children are encouraged to seek adult aid.**
- **A child who continues to act out aggressively and refuses to cooperate or apologise is removed from contact with other children for a couple of minutes and asked to reconsider his/her actions. The child may have to be asked repeatedly to apologise (every few minutes as necessary).**

'Truth has its own force'
Dalia Lama

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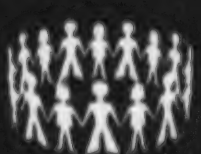

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